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DEMOCRACY IN EDUCATION

The American Teacher



Intercultural Understanding
and Misunderstanding.—By
CHIH MENG. See page 19.

APRIL, 1944



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EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

FOREWORD

THE MANY racial and national stocks of American society, despite the active working of the "melting pot," have never been completely integrated. The war is bringing into sharp outline the misunderstandings, prejudices, and tensions which have existed in varying degrees among these groups.

An encouraging development, however, is taking place—the increasing interest shown by educators in problems of racial and religious minorities. There is need for a great deal of serious thought to prevent these problems from being handled either as the "latest fad" or the pet project of a few radicals with their own axes to grind.

As far as education can effect changes, it is its function to examine human relations, to discover the difficult and controversial issues in these relationships, and to develop and use such methods as will produce desirable changes.

Education in human relations, then, must not be entered upon as a new device in an educational program but as a basic practice in preparing for a democratic society.

This issue of the *AMERICAN TEACHER* is presented, therefore, for the serious study of the improvement of human relations.

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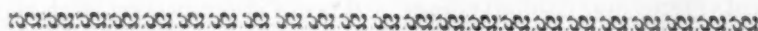
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April 1944

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"In the polity of a democracy the right to think and to express the conclusions of one's thinking are the most sacred privileges. Thinking may, for our purpose, be defined as a mental process of weighing known facts unprejudicially and reasonably. Resulting opinions come forth uncolored, unbiased, and worthy of expression within the ramification of the highest democratic principles. Thinking, however, presupposes two major prerequisites: one, knowledge of the facts involved in the particular case; and two, intelligence to compare and balance the criteria. De-

mocracy, then, boils down to be the result of intelligent thinking and intelligent formation of opinion."

The statement quoted above was made by Dr. Abraham I. Katsh, of New York University. It is our hope that this special intercultural education issue, which the last convention of the American Federation of Teachers instructed us to publish, may serve as a contribution toward the "intelligent thinking and intelligent formation of opinion" referred to by Dr. Katsh.

Philadelphia Local Holds Open Meeting on Racial Tensions and the Schools

3 PHILADELPHIA, PA.—The entire March meeting of the Philadelphia local was devoted to an open session on the question of what the schools should do in helping to build the better racial and religious understanding essential to democracy. The program for the open meeting was as follows:

RACIAL TENSION AND THE SCHOOLS

STEWART G. COLE, Executive Director of the Bureau for Intercultural Education.

"An Over-All Picture"

DAVID L. ULLMAN, Chairman, Legislative Committee, Anti-Defamation League.

"The Philadelphia Story"

TANNER DUCKREY, Special Assistant to the Superintendent of Schools, Philadelphia.

"The School Program"

Questions . . . and Answers

The decision to have the open meeting came as the result of a report made by the educational policies committee of the local at the February membership meeting.

Since group tensions, among youth as well as adults, have become more marked since the war, the committee had been studying incidents both within school and outside. The committee obtained information about many well-authenticated instances of racial or religious conflict, although no complete list could be obtained, since many authorities believe in a hush-hush policy. Social agencies, such as the International Institute, Fellowship House, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Chinese Christian Settlement, assisted the committee.

The *Federation Reporter* describes some of the incidents as follows:

"The most disturbing of recent troubles occurred one Friday night last month when a group of Jewish boys, leaving a skating rink at midnight, were set upon by about 30 other boys. One lad was kicked in the groin and left semi-conscious on the street; a second was beaten with an iron pipe, and others were beaten and kicked. Only 14 of the attackers were identified, but none of these had police records. They had never before been classed as hoodlums. Since most of them attended the same public high school, what is the responsibility of that school?

"When an interracial bowling team from Blank high school was refused privileges at a privately-owned bowling alley, the white students organized a movement which resulted in the owner's lifting the ban. This incident, also, did not take place on school grounds. What credit is reflected on the school which trained these students?

"Among children of the foreign-born, a few whose fathers have been interned and some of those children whose parents speak with a German accent, have

been scorned and humiliated as 'little Nazis' by their elementary school associates.

"Last spring, a group of Jewish high school girls were having a little 'birthday party' at their lunch table. A notoriously bad boy, often in trouble, smashed their cake, and a fight ensued. For two weeks the entire community was disturbed, with street gangs, equipped with brass knuckles, fighting at night. This particular incident was 'adjusted' with police help.

"In a school predominantly Negro, the election of an all-Negro student government caused the pupils to fear that they had voted on the basis of color rather than merit. Accordingly, they asked for a new election!

"Scurrilous writings, signs, and ditties in the schools are often the relatively small indications of attitudes which result in trouble outside.

"Here are examples, good and bad.

"What should the schools do?"

Interracial Democracy Promoted by Local 430

430 LOS ANGELES, CAL.—A program for promoting interracial democracy is being prepared for the Los Angeles schools as the result of the work of Local 430.

At the November meeting of the local a resolution was adopted in support of interracial democracy. This resolution, addressed to the Board of Education, contained the following proposals endorsed by many important social and labor groups throughout the city:

(1) That the curriculum department prepare and issue graded pamphlets written by a competent local anthropologist, for all school levels, on the subject, "Science's Explosion of Race Theories."

(2) That an Interracial Democracy Day be set aside in the schools to give recognition to contributions of all races to American democracy.

(3) That the Superintendent, by bulletin, urge that one auditorium program each semester be devoted to this subject.

(4) That the Superintendent also warn, by bulletin, against inciting racial antagonism, and insist on democratic attitudes to counteract it.

On December 13 the resolution was officially presented to the Board of Education by a delegation headed by Mr. McMillan, of Local 430, and supported by a large representation from church, labor, and humanitarian groups. More than 85 sponsors accompanied the resolution, carrying the support of an astonishingly large block of the city's liberal thought. Impressed, the Board accepted the resolution and acted upon it. They appointed a committee to meet with the local's interracial democracy committee to work out specific means of putting the four points of the resolution into effect.

So the plan is definitely on the march. Mr. Minkus and his committee on interracial democracy are to be warmly congratulated upon a brilliant achievement, for it was they who did the spade work.